

BUILDING A HERITAGE FOR THE FUTURE

OPENING ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE 51st CONGRESS OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS.

by Manas Buthelezi

Your organisation has consistently expressed concern not only for the solution of the problems that distinguish our country in the world community of nations, but also for the building of new structures that will shape the South Africa of tomorrow. You are one of those who believe that South Africa needs radical change in its presuppositions and goals if we are to move successfully from the violence of the present structures to a peaceful future. If one takes into account the realities of power politics, yours is a minority point of view, but if one thinks of the total population of South Africa, it is correct to say that your point of view is shared by approximately 18 million other South Africans.

When I decided to speak on **Building a Heritage for the Future** I had a two-fold conception of your present role as students. As members of white segregated institutions you symbolize the present heritage of South Africa. In terms of the radical ideas you have tried to articulate, you represent a growing number of those among whites who are beginning to believe that South Africa should offer future generations something better than the structures of racism and injustice.

In other words, you symbolize both the ugly present and the possible future heritage.

I. UGLY ASPECTS OF THE PRESENT HERITAGE

We are familiar with the messianic claims South Africans very often make, namely, that South Africa is a christian country in both background and direction and that it has a duty of protecting the values of Christian Western Civilization in Africa. Many unchristian things have been done under the cover of this noble consciousness of duty.

The "South African way of life" is not just a means of preserving the "christian heritage" but has also become a

heritage worth preserving in its own right. The two have become so confused that to preserve the "South African way of life" seems to mean the same thing as preserving the christian heritage.

Hence the enemies of the South African way of life are sometimes described in one breath as communists, atheists, leftists and liberal theologians of the World Council of Churches. This is very much evident in Pike's book, **Religion: Red and Rotten**, in which the WCC and its agencies get a savage rapping as see-through communist fronts.

You can understand the complex problems that arise as soon as matters of social and political order are mixed together in one big pot with questions of religious belief. You then get people with fixed dogmatic views on politics, economics and social order. For them to abandon these ideas is like the sin of apostasy.

I will look closely at two of the pillars of the South African way of life from the vantage point of a black man.

1. White Leadership

This is the belief that the white man's destiny in this country is to lead. Only the white man is best equipped to safeguard the values of western civilization and christian tradition. This is, however, more than just leadership of merit; it is leadership of race and colour.

It is needless to mention that no self-respecting black man nowadays believes this myth of white leadership, and yet its painful consequences are still with us. The average black man always meets the white man in some position of leadership; he meets him as his teacher, doctor, employer, etc. This is artificially designed to perpetuate the myth of white leadership. In order to emphasize this point Dr Verwoerd said: "I want to state unequivocally

that South Africa is a White man's country and he must remain the master here. In the reserves we are prepared to allow the Bantu to be the masters, but within the European areas we, the White people of South Africa, are and shall remain masters."

Both the black man and the white man stand to lose from the perpetuation of this myth. The black man is taught to despise and underestimate his potential in relation to that of the white man. This creates in him a slave mentality: "I need the leadership of the white man." The white man on the other hand, develops a "master-complex," as is evident in Dr Verwoerd's remarks. He either overestimates his worth or underestimates that of the black man. He remains incapable of gaining anything from the black man whom he despises. He will not respect the views of the black man since, according to the myth of white leadership, only the white man can initiate ideas and set things in motion. White leadership is therefore a myth and heritage of impoverishment.

2. Injustice

According to the South African heritage, some 3 million people decide things that affect 18 million people who can not vote. Whites meet in Cape Town every year to discuss among other things what to do with black people. Although other whites are allowed to oppose the government, black people who are the ones affected are not given the same liberty to voice meaningful opposition. Those who try, do so at the risk of being banned.

This is an example of a heritage of injustice. How else can one understand this? One can cite many other glaring examples of injustice. But this should suffice.

3. Violence

Part of the South African heritage is the violence built in the social, economic and political structures. Many people tend to think of violence only in terms of inflicting fatal bullet and stab wounds. They, as a result, overlook the violence that is rampant among us. Let us look at a few examples from our glorious South African heritage.

a) **Violence to the family:** The system of migrant labour about which much has been said and written has wrecked many an african family. Husband is forcibly separated from wife and father separated from children. Most working married men can be with their families on the average, for only two weeks in a year. If one considers the fact that the average man works until his physical age limit, this means that this man does not taste the fullness of married life till very late in life. This is a heritage of violence.

b) **Violence to Communities:** During the last twenty years groups of africans have experienced being removed from one place to the other. From the present look of things, we can expect even more of this in future. People and communities tend to develop emotional ties to their places of birth and origin. These places of origin add a certain dimension to their sense of community. We are told that these massive removals are a necessity; they are certainly a necessity in the context of the South African heritage of Group Areas; a South African phenomenon of violence.

c) **Economic Violence:** Paying people just enough so that they are able to survive is another face of our heritage of violence. No satisfactory explanation has been given why a white man should get more than a black man doing a similar job. The obvious reason is to keep the black man's standard of living lower. For many blacks work has become a medium of exploitation and dehumanization. Through their cheap labour black people have subsidized the economy of South Africa.

Unfortunately very little credit is given to this aspect of the black man's contribution. This is because the contribution comes as a result of exploitation which is another name for economic violence.

II. THE HERITAGE OF THE FUTURE

A. Nature of the Heritage

1. It must be a heritage built by all the peoples of South Africa. It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that the white man is just not equipped to be the only one who frames the lasting solutions of the future. One basic weakness of the proposed solution of Separate Development is that it has been framed and sanctioned by white people and only forced on black people. It may solve the white man's problem by clearing "white areas" of the black menace, but that in itself does not automatically transform "homelands" into an appealing paradise. A unilateral solution of this kind cannot be entirely free from the taint of selfish motives.

2. It must be a heritage that promotes and encourages positive values. It has been rightly or wrongly suggested that one basic difference between the American and the South African situations is that whereas in the U.S.A. the force of the law is against the segregationist and one who discriminates against others on the basis of race and colour, in South Africa the force of the law does not only condone those who preach discrimination, but it also censures severely those who advocate civil rights and racial justice. We are reminded of the fact that one thing the hundreds of banned people have in common is that they are people who believed and fought for civil and racial justice.

It is necessary for all South Africans to pause and think whether there is no element of truth in saying that positive values have sometimes not received sufficient official support. Think of spontaneous attempts to encourage fellowship between black and white families, between black and white school children, etc. Under normal circumstances these would be positive and constructive efforts. But are they in South Africa?

B. ROLE OF WHITE YOUTH

1. Black people think that the older you get the more alienated you become from black people. I very often admire the natural and human relationship that is evident between white babies and black nannies. If a white baby develops a sentimental attachment to its black nanny, this should be seen as something positive which may serve as a solid base for future more meaningful relationships. Unfortunately as the baby grows older this foundation of human relations is removed by the South African heritage.

I refer to this in order to emphasize that the moment you are in now as students, when you have not as yet

accumulated many unwithdrawable stocks in the apartheid enterprise, is the time of freedom—freedom to build the new South African heritage.

2. This is even of greater importance because tomorrow you are the ones who will live with the consequences of the actions of today. It is said that the “test of the pudding is in the eating”. You are the ones—of all white South Africans living today—who will truly experience the meaning and implications of the policy of Separate Development—be they good or bad. You will taste its bitterness and its sweetness whatever the case may be. Therefore when people embark on marginal instead of radical solutions to fundamental problems in order to avoid what it costs, those half-solved problems which will have become worse will confront you and you only. Therefore whatever is postponed is postponed for and to you. You must remember that if you do not play your part today your children will curse you for the awful heritage you will have transmitted to them, and if you die before they curse you, they will spit on your grave.

3. There are some encouraging aspects in the present day activities of some University students. You know that there is a need for good will between blacks and whites

in South Africa today. Good will, like love, exists as it is transmitted. What we need in South Africa today are media for channelling goodwill between the races in South Africa during a time when there is so much emphasis on keeping the races apart. I know that you are concerned about this problem too. How will the black man know and believe that the white man has good things up the sleeve for him? How do you enable the black man to have confidence in the white man who makes laws for him? By saying that blacks and whites should not study together, should not eat together, should not meet socially? What a negative method for trying to achieve something positive!

I know that some of your leaders have paid a heavy price for having dared to suggest an alternative to the present South African society. I believe that things like that do not happen in vain. As a result of the banning of your leaders many white people in South Africa were made aware of what banning is. This mass banning was a shock to many white people. Sometimes when words are no longer able to convert people, prophets may be called upon to preach through sacrificing something of their lives. It may very well be that this is the only way in which you can hope to build a heritage for the future.□

THE EMOLWENI SCHOOLS FEEDING SCHEME

by G. de Wet

Approximately twenty-five kilometres from Durban, the villages of Kloof and Hillcrest are sprawled across a narrow plateau which falls away dramatically into the valley of the Umgeni River. The lush vegetation of the plateau rapidly changes to thornbush and scrub, and on these dry, eroded slopes live many of the Africans who work in the neighbouring residential and industrial areas.

One of the features of this valley is the number of simple school buildings scattered along its length and breadth. Each one of these schools is symbolic of triumph over adversity, for education is not a matter of course to these people. School attendance is not compulsory and the schools themselves are not provided by the State. It is the parents who have to take the initiative, who have to raise the funds and erect the first classroom. Only then is there a chance of a second classroom being built by the State.

